

I am submitting this testimony once again as a concerned parent, voter and tax paying resident of Bridgeport. My name is Carmen A. Nieves, Grandmother, Parent Leader, Community Advocate, Resource Coordinator, and a proud Parent Leadership Training Institute Alum and Facilitator class of 2001.

I am writing to urge you to save the Connecticut Commission on Children and the Parent Trust Fund. Budget cuts proposed by Gov. Jodi Rell are aimed directly at the important work of this commission. Don't balance the state budget on the backs of our children!

Personal hardship resulted from my job being eliminated in 1999 by chance brought me to Bridgeport from Stamford. Having lost our home, care and other resources we moved to Bridgeport with out having any family or friends here. Finding the parent Center and enrolling in the Parent Leadership Training Institute changed my life and that of my family in so many positive ways.

I graduate in 2001 with my project title The East Side Resource Exchange. We made 250 referrals in two years, later we created a Walk In Center located in the Dept of Labor Office in Bridgeport in partnership with Career Resources & Infoline. I am proud to share that the very first year we where were open we handled over 2500 referrals for services, and earlier this year they secured a grant for \$175, 000 to continue the work of a volunteer effort started by a mother looking to connect with others, share information, and barter services. This is just my story, there are so many others.

In 2004 I was accepted as a facilitator and help guide the journey of other parent leaders in Stamford, Norwalk, Bridgeport, Milford who have run for office and won, they sit along side you as civic leaders, town committees members, board of Ed's members, and council representative all throughout CT.

I believe this is the best investment of human capital I have ever seen. Research shows that parent engagement has a positive impact on children's lives. Both the Commission and the Parent Trust Fund support planning, programs and activities that help parents and others work TOGETHER with school, community and state leaders to improve the health, safety and learning outcomes for ALL children.

There are many reasons of which many you have already heard. Here's why the Commission on Children and the Parent Trust Fund must be protected from budget-cutting efforts:

- The Parent Leadership Training Institute, funded by the Parent Trust Fund, has generated more than **1 million volunteer hours** in Connecticut. If we were paying for these hours at just minimum wage we are already saving nearly 8 million dollars.
- The Parent Leadership Training Institute promotes civic engagement and parent involvement in education. Study after study has shown that parent involvement in education is a key factor in a student's school success.